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ABSTRACT

This report examines the attitudes of 1,100 City University of New York (CUNY) freshmen, both Open Admissions (OA) and regular students, towards OA. For the purpose of this study OA freshmen in the senior colleges were those with high school averages below 80; OA freshmen in the transfer program of community colleges were those with averages below 75; and OA freshmen in the career program of community colleges were those with high school averages below 70. The students were asked what they thought of the OA policy; and whether the policy had made a difference in their going to college. The results indicated that student attitudes toward OA were predominantly favorable. Career Students were most favorable, and senior college students the least favorable. Career students were more likely than senior college students to say that OA had made a difference to them. One half of the OA students in senior colleges said that OA had made no difference to them. Among the regular students the most numerous were those for whom OA had made no difference but who were favorable toward OA. (AF)

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Attitudes of City University of New York Students Towards Open Admissions[1]

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During the year before Open Admissions was put into effect, there was some apprehension about it on the part of alumni, parents, and students. There was also considerable discussion of admissions procedures and the effects that they would have on various types of students. For this reason, we thought that it was important to include questions on attitudes towards Open Admissions in the interviews which University Research Corporation conducted with the City University freshmen.

The sample consisted of over eleven hundred freshmen; they came from all of the seven community or two-year colleges, and seven of the eight senior or four-year colleges. On most campuses we interviewed between 70 and 100 students. At each college, we drew random samples of Open Admissions and regular students.

Open Admissions students were defined as students whose relatively low high school averages probably would have prevented them from being admitted to their colleges and programs the preceeding year. Of the senior college students, those with high school averages below 80 were considered Open Admissions students. The two-year colleges contained two types of programs, transfer programs and career programs. Transfer

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1/ Paper presented at a symposium at the meetings of the American Psychological Association, "Will the Open Door Become a Revolving Door? --Some Preliminary Findings on Open Admissions at the City University of New York." Washington, D.C., September 3, 1971.

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programs were designed to permit the student to transfer to a senior college and obtain a bachelor's degree. If a student in a transfer program had a high school average below 75, he was considered an Open Admissions student. The career programs, on the other hand, led to a terminal degree at the end of two years. They included a wide variety of vocational programs in technical fields, health paraprofessional fields, secretarial science, data processing, and many other areas. If a student in a career program had a high school average below 70, he was considered an Open Admissions student. These definitions of Open Admissions and regular students are strictly our own, made for research purposes. The colleges made no effort to identify which students would have been admitted under their previous policies, and which would not.

Both types of students were asked a wide range of questions concerning their backgrounds and reasons for coming to college, their academic and nonacademic experiences with college, their overall satisfaction with college and their plans for the future. The students were asked two questions about the Open Admissions policy, "In general, what do you think of the City University's Open Admissions policy?" and "Did Open Admissions make a difference to you in going to college? Why?"

Data on attitudes toward Open Admissions are presented in Figure 1. Student attitudes towards Open Admissions were predominantly favorable; in every subsample, over half were favorable, 15 to 20 percent had mixed attitudes, and a fourth or less were unfavorable. Many students approved of the idea that everyone should have a chance for a college education. Some said that it was good to give students with educational problems a second

chance--those who didn't like high school, or got discouraged. Some mentioned the benefits to students with financial problems, but surprisingly few mentioned minority groups as benefiting from the policy.

Among the unfavorable comments, the most common ones were that Open Admissions caused overcrowding, lowered standards, and lowered the quality of education.

Not surprisingly, Open Admissions students were slightly more favorable towards the policy than regular students. However, for both Open Admissions and regular students, career students were most favorable to the policy and senior college students the least favorable. Among career students, about 70 percent were favorable; but among senior college regular students, only 54 percent were favorable.

Similar patterns were found in responses to the question of whether Open Admissions made a difference in their attending college (See Figure 2). Open Admissions students said that the Open Admissions policy had made a difference more often than did regular students. They most often said that their high school averages were low; a good percentage said that without Open Admissions, they would have gone to a different college. Some senior college students might have attended a junior college. Other students might have gone to a private college where they would have had to pay more. Some, of course, would not have been able to afford college if they had not been admitted to the City University.

Also, there was a strong tendency for career students to be more likely than senior college students to say that Open Admissions had made

a difference to them; this was true of both Open Admissions and regular students. Thirty-nine percent of the regular career students said that Open Admissions had made a difference to them, even though it had not; their high school averages of 70 and above would probably have admitted them to their technical and vocational programs in the two-year colleges, even under pre-Open Admissions policies. On the other hand, of the senior college Open Admissions students, students whose high school averages were too low for admission under last year's standards, half said that Open Admissions had made no difference to them. One might speculate that, in evaluating whether Open Admissions made a difference, the students were looking at the absolute value of their high school average, rather than their average in relation to the standards of their college and program. The regular career students had relatively low high school averages--70 and above--because of our choice of cut-off points for Open Admissions and regular students. Such students were more likely to say that Open Admissions had made a difference to them, even though they probably could have gotten into their particular college and program without Open Admissions.

When we combined the answers to the two questions, attitude toward Open Admissions and whether Open Admissions made a difference, we obtain a number of types of students. The most common categories were:

1. Students who said that Open Admissions had made a difference to them, and were favorable to it, and
2. Students who said that Open Admissions had <u>not</u> made a difference, but were favorable towards it anyway.

Some fell into another category:

3. Students who said that Open Admissions had made no difference to them and were unfavorable to it.

Only a very few fell into a fourth category:

4. Students who said that Open Admissions had made a difference to them, but were nevertheless unfavorable towards it.

For the purpose of simplification, this analysis ignores those students with mixed attitudes towards Open Admissions, and those who fell into the "Don't know," "Other," and "No answer" categories on either question.

The percentages of students falling into these various categories are shown in Table 1.

First, let us examine the regular students, students unaffected by Open Admissions, students who would probably have been admitted to their colleges or programs anyway.

Among the regular students are a group whom we might call the self-depreciators--students who said that Open Admissions had made a difference to them, even though it had not, and were favorable towards the policy. These students were most numerous among the career students. A second group, the most numerous overall, might be called the altruists --students who said that Open Admissions had made no difference to them personally, but were favorable to it anyway. These students were most numerous among transfer students, but were well-represented among all groups. A third group might be called the defenders of the status quo--

students who said that they had not benefited from Open Admissions and were against it. The highest percentage of these students occurred in the senior colleges--20 percent of the regular senior college students were of this type. Thus, the senior college students were relatively the most conservative, although even there, there were slightly more altruists than defenders of the status quo.

Secondly, we turn to the Open Admissions students, those who really did benefit from the Open Admissions policy, who probably would not have gotten into their program or college without it. Here, the most numerous group was students who thought that the Open Admissions policy had made a difference to them, and were in favor of it--students whose positive attitudes were consistent with their own self-interest. Half of the career students were of this type, more than in any other type of curriculum. Another major group was students who were favorable to Open Admissions, but said that the policy had not made a difference to them. Yet the policy had made a difference to them; their high school averages were too low for them to have been admitted to their colleges or programs, under pre-Open Admissions standards. Thus, these students might be thought of as unconscious beneficiaries. A third of the senior college Open Admissions students were of this type, and almost a third of the transfer Open Admissions students.

Thus, two types of students were more common among the career students than the transfer and senior college students: among the Open Admissions students, those who supported the Open Admissions policy, knowing that they

had benefited from it; and among the regular students, those who supported Open Admissions and thought they had benefited from it, even though they had not. The groups which were more common among the senior college students than among the career students were, for the Open Admissions students, unconscious beneficiaries (students who supported Open Admissions and thought they had not benefited from the policy, even though they had), and among the regular students, defenders of the status quo (students who knew they had not benefited, and were opposed to the policy).

Thus, Open Admissions was perceived as benefiting the student with an extremely low high school average, much more than it actually did. Many career students thought they had benefited from Open Admissions, even though they had not. Among transfer and senior college students, almost half of the students who had benefited from the policy were not aware of it. Of course, a majority of the "unconscious beneficiaries" supported the policy out of a sort of unknowing altruism.

Thus, the CUNY Open Admissions program is somewhat different from the special programs for disadvantaged students at other colleges. Students in some of these programs are more aware of their special identity as beneficiaries of the program. Many feel grateful to the program for giving them a chance to go to college that they would not have had otherwise. However, it is not clear whether such awareness is beneficial psychologically. Some students in special programs feel that it is an honor to be chosen to participate in the program. However, others are very aware of their relative lack of preparation. They suffer from feelings of inferi-

ority, and pessimism about being able to succeed. It is possible that such feelings might interfere with achievement; the CUNY policy of not identifying Open Admissions students may have a better effect on student motivation. In our later research, we hope to examine the issue of awareness that one is an Open Admissions student, and its relationship to achievement.

Attitudes of City University of New York Students
Towards Open Admissions

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Figure 1. Student Attitudes Towards Open Admissions

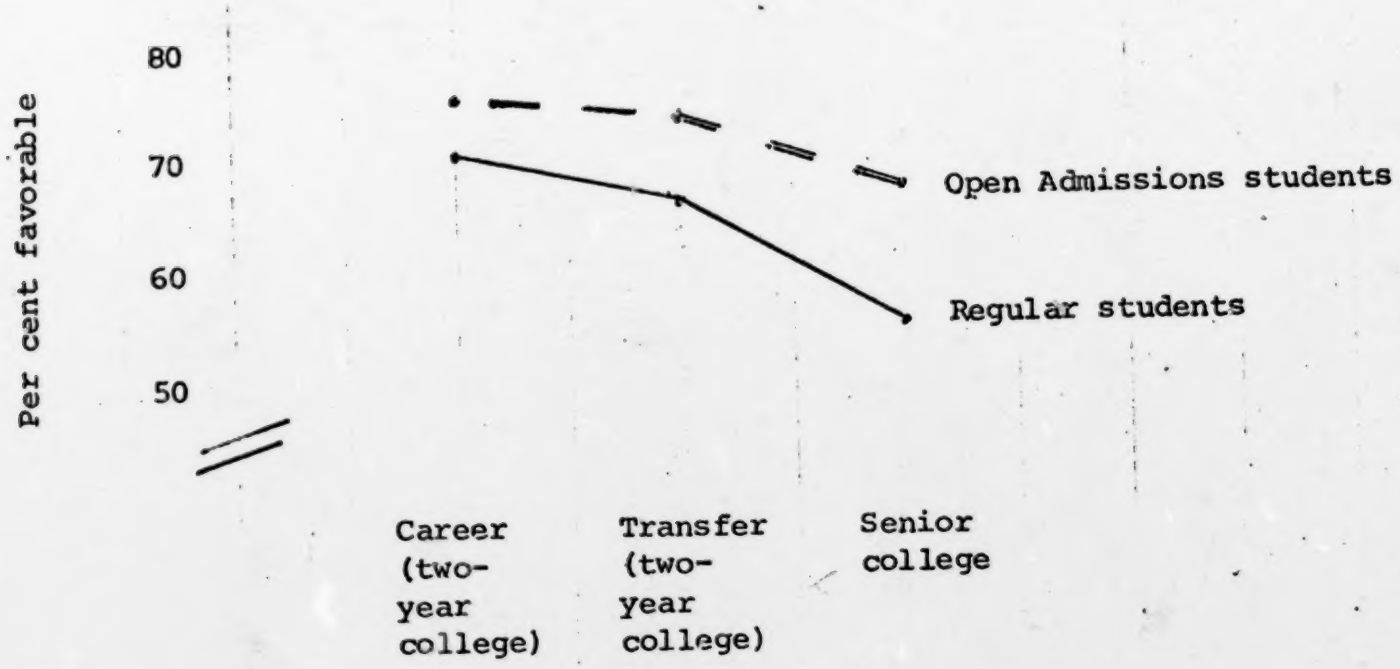

Figure 2. Student Perceptions of Whether Open Admissions Made a Difference in Their Going to College (Benefited Them)

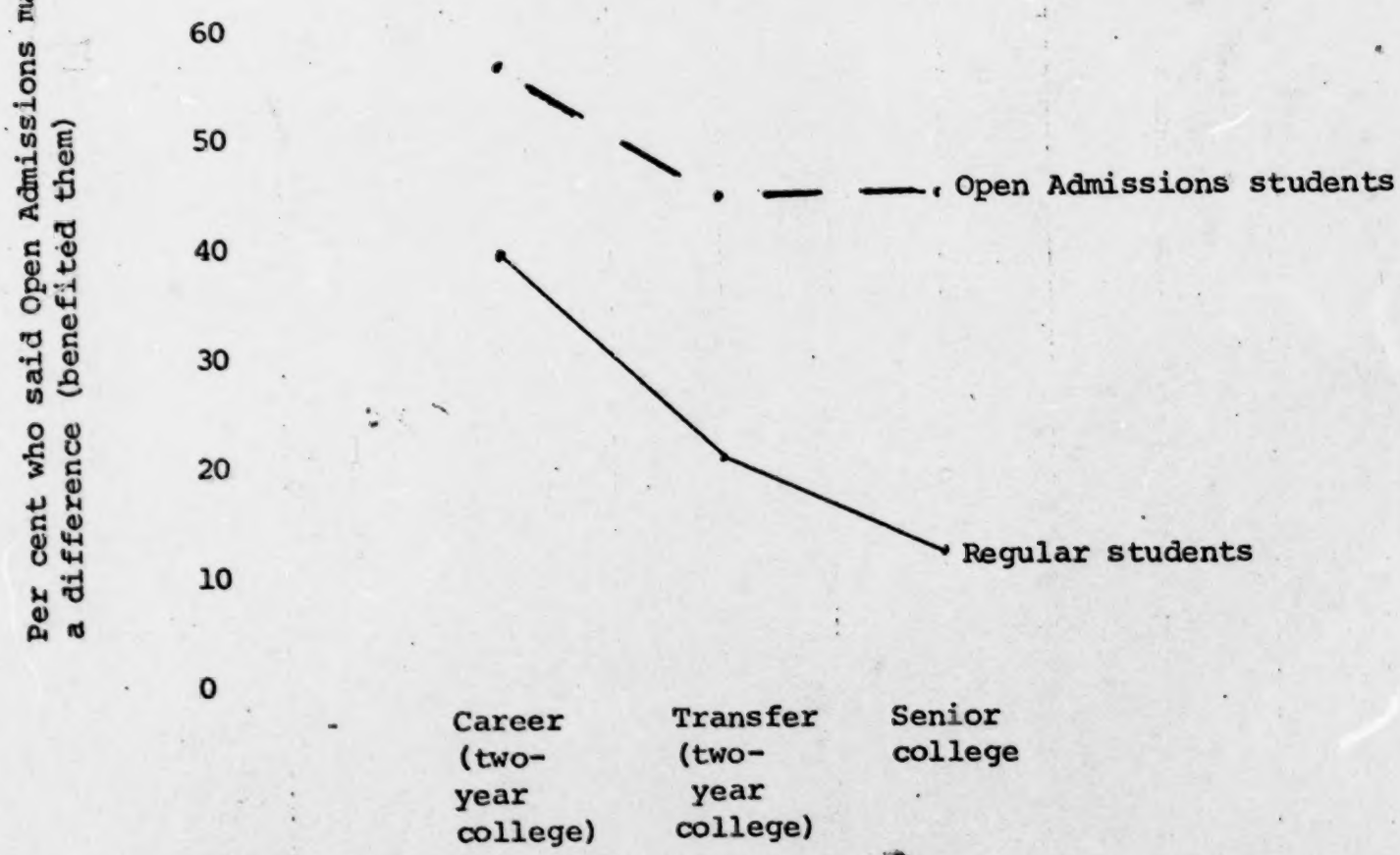

TABLE 1

ATTITUDE TOWARD OPEN ADMISSIONS AND PERCEPTION OF BENEFIT

(In Percentages)

Attitude Toward Open Admissions 1/	Perception of Whether Open Admissions Made A Difference 2/	REGULAR			OPEN ADMISSIONS		
		Two-Year Career Students (N=122)	Two-Year Transfer Students (N=97)	Four-Year College Students (N=312)	Two-Year Career Students (N=135)	Two-Year Transfer Students (N=191)	Four-Year College Students (N=314)
1. Favorable	Yes (benefit)	30	13	10	46	37	28
2. Favorable	No (no benefit)	36	48	40	22	30	33
3. Unfavorable	No (no benefit)	6	12	20	2	7	6
4. Unfavorable	Yes (benefit)	3	1	2	1	2	5

1/ Students in the "Mixed," "Other," "Don't know," and "No answer" categories omitted.

2/ Students in the "Other," "Don't know," and "No answer" categories omitted.

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